

Message Text

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16
ACTION SS-25

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INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY JIDDA

S E C R E T AMMAN 5406

EXDIS

E.O. 11652 XGDS-1
TAGS: PFOR JO SY IR IQ
SUBJECT: TALK WITH PRIME MINISTER OF MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENTS

1. SUMMARY: RIFAI NOTED THAT IRAN SEEMED TO BE DEVELOPING SOME RESERVATIONS ABOUT IRAQI PROPOSAL FOR A GULD DEFENSE FORCE. HE REPORTED THAT IRANIAN SUSPICION OF IRAQIS CONTINUES HIGH. CONTRARILY RIFAI CHARACTERIZED JORDAN-SYRIAN RELATIONS AS GOOD AND MOVING STEADILY FORWARD. GEOPOLITICALLY SYRIA MOST IMPORTANT STATE IN MIDDLE EAST TO JORDAN. "THEY CAN STRANGLE US" ACCORDING TO RIFAI. PRESENT MODERATE SYRIAN REGIME IS STABLE AND PROBABLY THE BEST THAT WILL COME ALONG AS FAR AS JORDAN IS CONCERNED. THE BAATH IS NOT AN IMPORTANT FORCE WITH PRESENT SYRIAN LEADERSHIP. JORDAN HAS GAINED ALL THAT IT HAS WANTED FROM THE RELATIONSHIP RIFAI CLAIMS TO HAVE GIVEN NOTHING IN RETURN. SYRIA IS READY FOR A PERIOD OF INWARD PEACEFUL DEVELOPMENT IF GOLAN IS RETURNED. RIFAI OVER LONG RANGE (10/15 YEARS) THINKS A REAL FEDERATION IS POSSIBLE AND IS NOT PHILOSOPHICALLY AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY PREPARED FOR SUCH A MOVE. RIFAI SAYS SYRIANS NOT HAPPY WITH SOVIETS AND IDEOLOGICALLY ARE SO MERCHANGE AND BUSINESS ORIENTED AS TO BE

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POOR SOCIALISTS. END SUMMARY.

2. SAW RIFAI AUGUST 7 ON ANOTHER MATTER
THIS WAS FIRST CHANCE SINCE MY RETURN AFTER HAWK
CONTROVERSY WITH CONGRESS TO TALK WITH HIM ABOUT RECENT DEVELOPMENTS. (I DID NOT FEEL IT WOULD BE POLITIC OR APPROPRIATE TO RAISE SUCH QUESTIONS LAST WEEK IN REPORT TO HIM AND KING ABOUT HAWKS)

3. I BEGAN BY ASKING HIM ABOUT IRANIAN REACTION TO IRAQI PROPOSAL ON GULF DEFENSE PACT. HE SAID THAT IRANIAN HAD APPEARED CONFUSED. HE HAD TWO HOURS WITH HOVEYDA ON SUBJECT. IRANIANS FIRST THOUGHT IT WOULD BE GOOD IDEA TO HAVE A FORCE IN THE GULF UNDER IRANIAN CONTROL. RIFAI SAID THAT HE ASKED RHETORICALLY WHETHER THE FORCE COULD POSSIBLY STAND AGAINST US OR THE SOVIETS, AND IF NOT WHO WAS IT DESIGNED TO BE USED AGAINST? IT SEEMED TO BE PLACED INTO IRAQI HANDS AND HE URGED THE IRANIANS TO LOOK AT THE PROPOSAL CAREFULLY.

4. I THEN ASKED RIFAI ABOUT IRANIAN IRAQI RELATIONS. HE SAID HIS VIEW IS THAT IRANIANS AT THE TOP LEVEL STILL DO NOT TRUST THE IRAQIS BUT THAT THE AGREEMENT WAS COMPLETED AT ALGIERS BECAUSE IRAN GOT EVERYTHING IT ASKED FOR. MEANWHILE SUSPICION AND DISTRUST ON THE IRANIAN SIDE CONTINUE, THE SITUATION IS BEING WATCHED VERY CLOSELY AND IRANIAN TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY OF MERCURIAL CHANGE IN THE AREA.

5. MOVING ON TO SYRIA. I ASKED RIFAI IF THE IRANIAN TREATMENT OF THEIR RELATIONS WITH IRAQ FOUND A PARALLEL IN THE DEVELOPING SYRIAN JORDANIAN RELATIONSHIP. HE ANSWERED MOST DECIDELY NOT. HE THEN GAVE ME AN OVERVIEW OF THE JORDANIAN IMPRESSION OF THEIR DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIP WITH SYRIA.

6. HE BEGAN BY NOTING THE LONGSTANDING REASONS HISTORICALLY, RELIGIOUS, ETHNIC, WHY SYRIANS AND JORDANIANS SHOULD GET ALONG. THE RECENT DIFFICULT HISTORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP IS AN ABERRATION NOT THE MAIN
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CURRENT. FOR JORDAN SYRIA IS THE MOST IMPORTANT COUNTRY IN THE REGION. IT CAN STRANGLE JORDAN ECONOMICALLY AND IN OTHER WAYS IF IT WANTS. EGYPT IS TOO FAR AWAY. SAUDI ARABIA IS VERY SIGNIFICANT BUT NOT NOW A THREAT. IRAQ IS ALSO TOO DISTANT TO MATTER THE WAY THAT SYRIA DOES. ALSO THE BAATH IN SYRIA IS NO LONGER A FORCE. WHAT YOU HAVE NOW IS MERELY REGIME A LEADING CLIQUE WITHOUT AN IDEOLOGY EXCEPT FOR PRAGMATIC

ACTIONS. AS FAR AS JORDAN IS CONCERNED THIS GROUP IS ABOUT THE MOST MODERATE AND STABLE ONE SYRIAN HAS EVER HAD. THEY ARE NOT CAUGHT UP IN BAAHIST IDEOLOGY AS A GROUP JORDANIANS ARE TRADITIONALLY FEARFUL ABOUT AND THEY ARE NOT SOCIALISTS.

7. RIFAI WENT TO TO SAY THAT JORDAN IS MOVING IN A MEASURED AND CAREFUL WAY WITH SYRIA. THUS FAR EVERYTHING WHICH JORDAN HAS WANTED IT HAS GOTTEN AND JORDAN HAS NOT GIVEN INTO ANY SYRIANS REQUESTS WHICH IT DOES NOT WANT TO HONOR OR FULFILL. THERE IS A STRONG PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WHICH HAS DEVELOPED BETWEEN THE KING AND ASAD AND THIS IS NOT TO BE DISCOUNTED AS A REASON FOR THE RAPPROCHMENT. ALL THE SYRIANS REALLY WANT IS THE GOLAN BACK. THEY ARE FED UP WITH THE PALESTINIANS AND THE PROBLEM AND DEEPLY WANT TO GET RID OF ALL OF THESE DISTRACTIONS IN THE PATH OF THE PEACEFUL INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR OWN COUNTRY.

8. HE WENT ON TO NOTE THAT "SOMEDAY I CAN SEE A FEDERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES OR AT LEAST A QUASI FEDERATION BUT IT WILL TAKE TIME, MAYBE TEN TO FIFTEEN YEARS TIME" BUT BASICALLY THEY ARE VERY SIMILAR TO US AND THE TWO PEOPLES WERE SO CLOSE TOGETHER FOR SO MANY YEARS THERE IS NO REASON WHY WE COULD NOT BE ONE PEOPLE AGAIN".

9. I ASKED HIM ABOUT THE DEPTH OF SOVIET INFLUENCE IN SYRIA. HE SAID THAT IN TERMS OF THEIR BUSINESS AND SUPPLY RELATIONSHIPS THE SYRIANS COMPLAIN ABOUT THE SOVIETS AND DO NOT PARTICULARLY APPRECIATE THEM. THERE ARE FRICTIONS, HE SAID IDEOLOGICALLY THEY (THE SYRIANS)

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CAN NEVER BE GOOD SOCIALISTS. THEY ARE THE BEST MERCHANTS IN THE AREA HE THEN SAID WHY ARE THE SYRIAN HEWS SO REDUCED IN DAMASCUS AND THEY TEND TO HAVE A PENCHANT FOR THE MERCANTILE? HE ANSWERED BECAUSE THE SYRIANS ARE BETTER MERCHANTS. ALL OVER SYRIA PEOPLE ARE TRADERS AND THEY ARE NOT VERY EFFECTIVE SOCIALISTS. BESIDES WHEN THEY COME TO JORDAN THEY ARE ASTONISHED AT OUR WAY OF LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT AND ARE INTERESTED IN EMULATING OUR FREE MARKET PROCESS.

10. RIFAI SAID THAT ONE OF REASONS WHY HE AND KING WILL BE PAYING LONG VISIT TO SYRIA ON AUGUST 17 IS TO INSURE THE WIDEST POSSIBLE PUBLIC EXPOSURE TO JORDAN AND KING'S IDEAS AND THAT THEY WILL VISIT ALL REGIONS OF SYRIA IN COURSE OF TRIP. (RIFAI ALSO

CONFIRMED THEY WILL PAY A SEVERAL DAY VISIT TO EGYPT
BEGINNING AUGUST 30 (CAIRO 7464 (NOTAL))

11. COMMENT: THIS IS THE MOST ROSEATE AND WE BELIEVE NICE
VIEW WEHAVE HEARD FROM THE NEW JORDANIAN SYRIAN RAPPROCHMENT AND
SINCE IT COMES FROM ONE OF THE PRIME ARCHITECTS
OF THE NEW STRUCTURE ALSO A VIEW NOT TO BE TAKEN
LIGHTLY. CERTAINLY WE QUESTION WHETHER SYRIA IS LIKELY OR ABLE
TO IGNORE THE PALESTINIANS EVEN IF GOLAN IS RETURNED..DURING
OUR CONVERSATION RIFIA LEFT ME WITH THE
CLEAR IMPRESSION THAT HE IS ALSO GOING TO BE
CAUTIOUS ABOUT MOVING TOO RAPIDLY ON MILITARYISSUES
OUT OF A SENSE OF THE PAST US JORDANIAN RELATIONSHIP AND
SENSITIVITIES RIGHT NOW IN CONGRESS ABOUT HAWKS.
HOWEVER PHILOSOPHICALLY AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY RIFIA
IS WELL DOWN THE ROAD IN HIS JUSTIFICATION OF THE THE
NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH SYRIA. IN SPITEOF THE LARGE AND
APPARENTLY WARM CROWDSWHICH TURNED OUT FOR THE
ASAD VISIT, WE BELIEVE THAT RIFIA IS PROBABLY WELL
AHEAD OF MOST ELEMENTS OF THE POPULATION AND
THE MILITARY IN PARTICULAR WHO WELL REMEMBER
THE REVOLVING DOOR CHANGES INSYRIAN REGIMESOF
THE PAST AND THE TANKATTACK ACROSS THE BORDER IN
1970. PUBLIC LINE WHICH KING AND RIFAI WILL PROBABLY
CONTINUE TO PURSUE ON SYRIA IS BEST SUMMED UP IN
KING UP INTERVIEW OF AUGUST 6 WHICH WE HAVE
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REPORTED SEPARATELY (AMMAN 5373) END COMMENT.
PICKERING

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